

and open every window from the inside to measure the protruding sills with a rule. Once, when he was leaning far out of a drawing-room window, he asked politely over his shoulder would Mrs. Huntington please pass him his magnifying glass, which the little widow did graciously, picking it up quite unconsciously in the hand in which she held her lace handkerchief. In departing he offered her his fountain pen to sign his call-slip, but, not seeing the gesture, she used her own pen instead. By the end of the week a complete dossier of No. 142 was in the hands of Mr. Parr. In only one point had Parr's camera-eyed sleuths failed; they carried away nothing bearing the imprint of the pink fingertips of the pathetic widow herself. Later, when the magnifying glass was used in Center Street, it yielded only a hazy replica of her fine lace handkerchief.

PARR selected a cigar for himself from the pasteboard box by Oliver's elbow.

Armiston, the extinct author, was merely another phase of Deputy Parr's amazing versatility. Armiston had been a weaver of tall tales, thrillers. On one occasion he had been too realistic; a cunning thief had actually copied Oliver's fiction into fact, with murder as its outcome. The ensuing sensation had driven the hectic author into retirement. Here the argus-eyed deputy found him. If fiction could be done into fact, then why not fact into fiction? So reasoned the very practical Deputy of Police.

Parr would dress the stage for Oliver, with characters and scenery, and ring up the curtain on a frozen plot. The results had always, to the matter-of-fact policeman, bordered on the mystic.

"As a matter of fact," said Parr, confidentially, "we don't detect crime. Crime detects itself."

"It's too bad the perpetrators aren't so obliging," put in Oliver.

"But, my dear fellow, they are—that's just the point," said Parr, expansively.

"They detect themselves, Parr?"

"Oh, absolutely. Inevitably. That is—eventually. The element of time enters, of course. We simply wait," explained the policeman blandly. "Sooner or later every crook comes home to roost. I have a man sitting on the doorstep waiting for him." Parr smiled childishly.

"You must admit it requires some intelligence on your part to pick the right doorstep," said Armiston.

"Not at all!" retorted Parr. "They give us the address." He chuckled. Armiston returned to his ciphering.

"Every dog has its flea," said Parr, nodding solemnly. "Every crook has his squealer. I have never known it to fail."

"How about the lone-wolf—the crook without a pal?"

Parr sniffed contemptuously.

"He brags," he said tartly. "Squeals on himself. It's all the same, in the long run. We have no failures. Unfinished business, yes. Sooner or later somebody blabs—blabs to me! That's what I'm here for! Let me illustrate," he went on gravely. "Did you ever hear of Sophie Lang? I suspect not. She was before your time."

Armiston shook his head.

"In the old days," Parr said, "we used to assign our bright young men to the Sophie Lang case. It was like sending a machinist's apprentice for a lefthanded monkey wrench, or a quart of auger holes. There wasn't no such animal." He laughed.

"Oh, ah! A legendary crook! I say, that's beautiful!" exclaimed Oliver.

"Legendary is right," assented the Deputy. "None of us ever saw her. We knew her only by her works. When we came a cropper, we'd say 'that's Sophie.' When something slick was turned, we'd say 'that's Sophie.' We used to say that Sophie signed her serious work, like any other artist. Well, Sophie's turned up," said Parr softly.

"A squeal?"

"Certainly. What else? Haven't I been telling you?"

"But who—who squealed?"

Parr assumed a hurt look.

"Who?" he repeated. "How the devil do I know? An anonymous letter." He grunted. "They drop on my desk like the gentle dew from heaven. I am assigning myself, in my old age, to the Sophie Lang case. But this time she ain't no impossible animal, Sophie"—he paused for effect. "Sophie is Mrs. Huntington."

"The widow—the insurance widow?"

Parr nodded slowly, his eyes gleaming.

Armiston eased himself back in his chair and said disgustedly:

"I've been meeting her around for years. She's—she's eminently respectable," protested Oliver.

"Sophie would be," agreed Parr.

Armiston found Parr's complacency irritating.

"Is there anything to suggest Sophie?" he demanded.

"There's that quarter of a million dollars," chuckled Parr.

Then, with sudden inspiration Oliver queried, "Has she signed it? You say she does—or did?"

"There isn't a flaw in her case," said Parr. "That's her usual signature. Limpid. She's beaten the insurance people twice, your sheltered little widow. They put the burden of proof

"Anything. Sophie isn't squeamish," said Parr. "I've got a paperweight in my museum collection, with some human hair on it—and some finger marks. I've always thought I'd like to see Sophie's fingerprints."

Oliver was abstractedly brushing his white lock with contemplative fingers. Helping himself to a fresh cigar, the Deputy of Police guessed he would be moving.

"DOES any one follow, William?" The sheltered widow smiled almost wistfully, as she whispered the inquiry through the speaking tube.

"The mechanic from across the street, ma'am," replied William out of the corner of his mouth, without moving his lips. The faithful sentry added that the red-headed mechanic was on foot this time.

"Drive slowly," commanded the bereaved woman. "Don't hurry him."

But the red-headed mechanic straightway began to lag; he discovered an interest in window-shopping, particularly in those windows displaying tires of renovated rubber. Shortly he found what he sought, for he entered a shop—and that was the last she saw of him for this time.

Undoubtedly the "office" (she had unconsciously dropped back into the argot of her craft) had been passed. They were hunting her in relays!

Sophie preened herself. She laughed softly. Instantly she closed her pretty lips over her pretty teeth again. Out of the corners of her long eyes she examined her neighbors in the procession. Among them she knew must be one tied to her heels like a noonday shadow. She tried her old bag of tricks, one by one. But with no results—except certainty. When finally that afternoon she returned to her domicile, by devious ways, her red-headed mechanic was tinkering with still another sick motor at the curb in front of his shop; he did not even raise his eyes when her brougham drove up and drove away.

From that moment Mrs. Amos P. Huntington gradually faded out of the picture. The outer semblance of that quondam widow remained—her clothes, her speech, her aspect of grief; but beneath it all was Sophie, watching with beadlike eyes. For several days she devoted her talents to catching the red-headed mechanic in the act of passing her bodily to the tender mercies of his relief. But never did she detect the actual moment. This was finesse! Maybe it was the great Parr himself! She thrilled for an instant on this note. Then she decided on a stroke boldly characteristic.

When William had tucked her in among her moleskin robes, he crossed to the red-headed man and informed him that his mistress would have speech with him.

"What is your name?" she asked when the red-headed man stood respectfully, cap in hand, at her carriage door.

"John Hanrahan, ma'am," he replied.

"I have had my eyes on you for some time, John, without your knowing it," said she, keenly. "You are to enter my service," she informed him, with the large air of conferring an inestimable favor; and without awaiting an answer she told John that he was to go with William to bring home a new car—she was giving up her pair because the pavements were too hard on their feet. William was instructed to take John to the tailor and have him outfitted. All this with a gracious smile, while she complimented John on the way he carried himself. The widow spoke in a little thread of a voice which broke, here and there, when she would close her eyes with a sigh. But the element of humor in the transaction was the ultimate appeal.

A FEW days later Parr himself held up by one of his own regal traffic cops at a busy corner, had the grim satisfaction of seeing Sophie taking his red-headed mechanic out for an airing. The new car itself was quite as perfect in its way, as had been her prancing pair—a town-car imported from France. The motor occupied a glistening handbox away up forward. Sophie was enclosed in a gorgeous candy-box away aft. Parr's man was exposed to the world and the weather as the only visible living thing aboard, perched on a slender capstan of a seat arising out of the bare deck amidships. She was making a Roman holiday of him. Parr could not repress a chuckle—it was so like Sophie!

The Dresden china widow (or what remained of her for popular consumption) did not vary her surface routine by a jot. Before many days had passed she had isolated her red-headed mechanic's pack-brothers. One was a man with a brown derby, who always chewed a cold cigar. The other was a frayed taxi-driver with a moth-eaten beard, who had a stand just off the Avenue. They were merely the hounds following blindly. It was the huntsmen behind of whom she must catch a glimpse. Her sixth sense told her that her daily life was as closely hemmed in as is an expanse of ocean by a cloudless sky. The real artist of the game was yet to reveal himself. Some move must be impending.

Her telephone she handled with the utmost delicacy—they had tapped that, of course. Whenever she used it, she would set it down softly, then instantly pick it up again, and listen for



"COME ALONG QUIETLY AND DON'T START ANYTHING," HE SAID AMIABLY, AND LED THE MOURNER UP THE STONE STEPS.

on her. It wasn't any burden—for Sophie." He guffawed. "She hasn't got the boodle yet—they are marking time for another appeal. They'll only get themselves disliked for picking on a poor helpless female. Helpless female is good!" And Parr fairly shook with mirth.

"Have you looked her up?" demanded Armiston.

"Naturally. Everybody has looked her up. Clean slate. Too clean. That's Sophie. Sophie doesn't react to the ordinary methods," the Deputy said. "That's why I've come to you. I thought maybe you'd like to undertake a little psychic research."

"What's her line, Parr?" asked Armiston when Parr finished recounting his findings.

But that same afternoon, when she was about to turn into the Avenue at the misty hour of winter twilight she picked him up again, in her "busy-body" mirror. In the mirror the cut of his jib fairly screamed his origin and purpose, to the experienced eyes of the widow. Police! No doubt of it! The flutter of his motor sounded behind.

"Careful, William—pocket him!" cautioned the lady.

"He's gone, ma'am—gone cross-town," confessed the disconsolate William.

Now suddenly Sophie Lang became all alert.

"Did you see him pass the 'office,' William?"

But William had not.

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